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FAMOUS AUTHORS AS SEEN BY A BOOK CLERK

WE have now to record an extraordinary adventure. Our later education was derived in some considerable measure from the writings of Mr. Henry James. This to explain our emotion. We had never expected to behold himself, the illustrious expatriate who had so far enlightened an unkempt mind. But the night before we had been talking of him. Indeed, it is impossible for us to fail to perceive here something of the supernatural.

But hold! "William Edwards," says a newspaper notice, "who used to drive a post stage between New York and Albany, died on Saturday at his home. He was born in Albany," and so and so, "and many were the stories he had to tell of incidents connected with the famous men who were his passengers." Even so. We were ourselves a clerk. That is, for a number of years we waited on customers in a celebrated book shop. This is one of the stories we have to tell of the personages who were, so to say, our passengers. Or perhaps we are more in the nature of those unscrupulous English footmen to high society, of whom we have heard, who "sell out" their observation and information to the society press.

Anyhow, we are of a loquacious, gossipy turn; and we were booksellers, so to speak, to crowned heads. We have recently heard, too, of another precedent to our garrulous perform-

ance, the publication in Rome of the memoirs of an old waiter, who carefully set down the relative liberality of prominent persons whom he served. After having served Cardinals Rampolla and Merry del Val, this excellent memoirist entered opposite their names, "Both no good." With this we drop the defensive.

We noticed Mr. Wharton sitting down, legs crossed, smoking a cigar. Awaiting, we presumed, his wife. A not unpicturesque figure, tall, rather dashing in effect, ruddy visage, dragoon moustache, and habited in a light, smartly cut sack suit of rather arresting checks, conspicuous gray spats; a gentleman manifesting no interest whatever in his surroundings.

Mr. Brownell, the critic, entered through the front door and moved to the elevator.

There stepped from the elevator car a somewhat portly little man who joined Mr. Wharton. He wore a rather queer-looking, very big derby hat, oddly flat on top. His shoulders were hooped up somewhat like the figure of Joseph Choate. A rather funny, square, box-like body on little legs. An English look to his clothes. Under his arm an odd-looking club of a walking-stick. Mr. Brownell turned quickly to this rather amusing though not undistinguished figure, and said, "Mr. James — Brownell." The quaint gentleman took off his big hat, discovering to our intent curiosity a pol-

ished bald dome, and began instantly to talk, very earnestly, steadily, in a moderately pitched voice, gesticulating with an even rhythmic beat with his right hand, raised close to his face.

Joined presently by Mrs. Wharton, the party, bidding Mr. Brownell adieu, took a somewhat humorous departure (we felt) from the shop, Mr. James, with some suddenness, preceding out the door. Moving nimbly up the Avenue, he was overhauled by Mrs. Wharton under full sail, who attached herself to his arm. Her husband by an energetic forward play around the end achieved her other wing. In this formation, sticks flashing, skirt whipping, with a somewhat spirited mien, the august spectacle receded from our rapt view, to be at length obliterated as a unit by the general human scene.

We saw Mr. James after this a number of times. Accompanied again by Mrs. Wharton, and later in the charge (such was the effect) of another lady, who, we understand, drives regularly to her social chariot literary lions. In something like six years' observation of the human being in a book shop, we have never seen any person so thoroughly in a book store, a magazine that is of books, as Mr. James. One can be, you know—it is most common, indeed—in a book store and at the same time not to be in a book store—any more than if one were in a hotel lobby. Mr. James “snooked” around the shop. He ran his nose over the tables, and inch by inch (he must be very short-sighted) along the walls, stood on tiptoe and pulled volumes from high places, rummaged in dark corners, was apparently oblivious of the presence of anything but the

books. He was not the slightest in a hurry. He would have been, we felt, content and quite happy, like a child with blocks, to play this way by himself all day.

Happening, by our close proximity, to turn to us the first time in the shop that he required attention, upon each succeeding visit he sought out us to attend to his wishes. The position of retail salesman “on the floor” is one completely exposed to every human attitude and humour. Against arrogance, against contempt of himself as a shop person, a species of “counter-jumper,” against irascibility, against bigoted ignorance, against an indissoluble assumption, perhaps logical, that he is of inferior mentality, this factotum has no defence. His very business is to meet all this with amenity. It is his daily portion, included in the material with which he works.

It (he finds) injures him not, essentially; it ceases to particularly effect him, beyond his inward appraisal of the character before him. Toward him one acts simply in accordance with the instincts of one's nature. His status counsels no constraint, invites no display, has no property of stimulation. Thus the view of a famous man's character from the position of retail clerk is valuable, Mr. James' manner with Mr. Brownell would hardly be the same as toward us. But it was exactly. There was present in his mind at the moment, was quite apparent, absolutely no consciousness of any distance of mind, or position, between him and us. He sought conversation (any suggestion of so equalising a thing as conversation with a clerk is not uncommonly repressed by

the important as preposterous.) In his own talk with us, he seemed to us to be a man consciously striving with the material of words and sentences to express his thought as well as he could.

He was very earnest. He looked up at us constantly (we are a little tall) with fixed concentration of gaze, and moved his hand to and fro as though seeking to balance his ideas. He asked questions with deference. Among other things, he desired very much to know what per cent. of the novels on the fiction table was the product of writers in England. "I live in England myself," he said very simply. "and I am curious to know this." He expressed a little impatience at the measureless flood of mediocre fiction, making a fluttering gesture conveying a sense of impotence to give it attention. He barely glanced at the pile of his own book, and did not mention it. He did not seem at first (though we believe later he changed this opinion) to think highly of Arnold Bennett (this was at the first bloom of Mr. Bennett's vogue here), nor to have read him. "Oh, yes, yes; he is an English journalist," in a tone as though, merely a journalist. Clear artist in fibre. When he took his departure he bade us "Good day," and lifted his hat.

Succeeding visits caused us to suspect that Mr. James' ideas of the machinery of business are somewhat naïve. He seemed to regard us as, so to say, the whole works. It entered our heads that maybe Mr. James thought we received and answered all matter of correspondence, editorial as well as that connected with the retail business, opened up in the morning, read, accepted, and rejected manu-

script, nailed up boxes for shipment, swept out the shop, and were acquainted perfectly with all confidential matters of the House. "I wrote you" (us), "you know," he said. And he referred by the way, apparently upon the assumption that the matter had been laid before us, to business of which we could not possibly have cognizance. And then he desired to send some books. Fumbling in his breast pocket he produced a letter, from which he read aloud a list of his own works apparently requested of him. Carefully replacing his letter, he said: "I should like to send these books to my sister-in-law." With that he started out.

Now, it was not a difficult problem to assume that this could be no other than Mrs. William James, still it is customary for purchasers to state the name of the person to whom goods are to go, and many people are skeptical that the salesman has it down right even then. "Your sister-in-law, Mr. James, is—?" we suggested. "Oh, yes, of course—of course; Mrs. William James; of course—of course," Mr. James said. Now, certainly, he supposed (it was evident) he had got finally settled a difficult and complicated piece of business. Mrs. William James' regular address we might reasonably infer. Still it might be that she was at the moment somewhere else on a visit. It were better to have Mr. James give his order in the regular way. "And the address?" we mentioned. "Oh, yes—oh, yes; of course—of course," Mr. James said apologetically. Then, pausing a moment to see if there was anything more in his bewildering labyrinth of details to such a complex

transaction, he departed, taking, as he drew away, his hat, as Mrs. Nickleby says, "completely off."

Instead of ascending directly to that regal domain which is unaware of our existence, Mr. James, with the inclination of a bow, approached us one day and inquired, in a manner as though the decision rested largely with us, whether he "could see" the head of the firm. The lady who was his escort swept past him. "Oh, I am sure he will see him," she declared, "this" (with impressive awe) "is Mr. James." Had we said, No, right off the bat, so to say, like that, we believe (unchampioned) Mr. James would have gently withdrawn.

We also can remember with especial entertainment the first time we saw F. Hopkinson Smith. (We were ashamed to say that he was known among our confrérie, the salesmen, as "Hop" Smith.) He introduced himself to us by his mustache. Looming rapidly and breezily upon us—"Do you know me?" he said, swelling out his "genial" chest (so it seemed) and pointing, with a militarish gesture, to his decoration. We looked a moment at this sea gull adornment, somehow not unfamiliar to us, and said. "We do." Mr. Hopkinson Smith, we perceived, regards this literary monument, so to say, as a household word (to put it so) in every home in the land. Mr. Smith, a very robust man, wore yellow, sulphur-coloured gloves, a high hat, a flower in his buttonhole, white piping to his vest. A debonair figure, Chanticleerian. Fresh complexion. Exhaling a breeze of vigor. Though not short in stature, he is less tall than, from the air of his photo-

graphs, we have been led to expect. A surprise conveying a curious effect, reminded one of that subconscious sensation experienced in the presence of a one-time tall chair which has been lowered a little by having had a section of its legs sawed off.

Mr. Smith's conversation with book clerks we found to be confined to inquiries (iterated upon each reappearance) concerning the sale of his own books. We appreciate that this may not be the expression of an irrestrainable vanity, or obsessing greed, realising that very probably his professional insight into human character informs him that the subject of the sale of books is the range of the book clerk's mind. He expressed a frank and hearty pride (engaging in aspect,) we felt in the long-sustained life of "Peter," which remarkably selling book survived on the front fiction table all its contemporaries, and in full vigor lived on to see a new generation grow up around it there. In a full-blooded, sporting spirit Mr. Smith asked us if his new book was "selling faster than John Fox's." Heartiness and geniality is his rôle. A man built to win and to relish popularity. With a breezy salute of the sulphur-gloved hand, he is gone. Immediately we feel much less electric.

Alas, what an awful thing! Oliver Herford, with heavily dipped pen poised, is about to autograph a copy of his "Pen and Ink Puppet," when, lo! a monstrous ink blot spills upon the fair page. Hideous! Mr. Herford is nonplussed. The book is ruined. No! Mr. Herford is not Mr. Herford for nothing. The book is enriched in value. Sesame! With his pen Mr. Her-

ford deftly touches the ink blot, and it is a most amusing human silhouette. How characteristic an autograph, his delighted friend will say.

We were quite satisfied in the introduction given us in our sojourn as a book clerk with Mr. Herford. That is to say, our early education was received largely from the pages of *St. Nicholas Magazine*; and when grown to man's estate and brought to mingle with the great we might easily have suffered a sentimental disappointment in Mr. Herford. But no, he is as mad as a March hare. He never, we should say, has any idea where he is. An absolutely blank face. Mind far, far away. Doesn't act as though he had any mind. A smallish, clean-shaven man, light sack suit, somewhat crumpled. A fine shock of grayish hair. Cane hooked over crooked arm. List to starboard, like a postman. Approaches directly toward us. We prepare to render our service. Perceives something in his path (us) just in time to avert a collision, swerves to one side. Takes an oblique tack. But speaks, (always particular to avoid seeming to slight us,) in a very friendly fashion. Though gives you the impression that he thinks you are some one else. A pleasant, unaffected man to talk to. Somewhat dazed, however, in effect. Curious manner of speech, of which evidently he is unconscious, partly native English accent, partly temperamental idiosyncrasy. A very simple eccentric, what in the eighteenth century was called "an original." Reads popular novels.

It was given to us to see the launching throes of a nouveau novelist. We noticed day after day a well-built young

man come in to gaze at the fiction table, a sturdy, spirited, comely chap. A fine snap to his eye we particularly noticed, and admired. He seemed to derive much satisfaction from this occupation and to be in an excellent frame of mind. And then, it struck us, he grew of troubled mien. He asked us one day how "Predestined" was selling. So we had the psychology of the situation. He asked, on another, if we had sold a copy of "Predestined" yet. A few days following he inquired "how long it takes before a book gets started?" Dejected was his mien. It took "Predestined" some time. Then it went very well. We sold a joyous-looking Stephen French Whitman, an embodiment of gusto—there was a positive crackle to his fine black eyes—a pile of books concerning themselves with Europe, and did not see him again for some time. Then he flashed upon us a handsome new moustache.

Our acquaintance with Mrs. Wharton was—merely formal. "Oh," very pleased exclaimed an aquiline lady, patrician unmistakable, of aristocratic features which we recognised from the portraits of magazines, "I'll take this." She had in her hand a copy of the then quite new pocket edition "Poems" of George Meredith. She was very fashionably, strikingly, gowned, somewhat conspicuously; a large pattern in the figure of the cloth. She carried a little dog. There was about her something, difficult to denote, brilliant and hard in effect, like a polished stone. And we felt the rarefied atmosphere of a wealthy, highly cultivated, rather haughty society. "Charge to Edward Wharton," she said, very

nicely, bending over us as we wrote "Lenox, Mass." She pronounced it not Massachusetts, but Mass, as is not infrequent in the East. "Thank you," she said; she swept from us. Our regard was won to this incarnation of distinction by the pleasant humanity of her manners, her very gracious "Good morning" to the elevator man as she left.

"Dicky" Davis we always called him behind his back. And such he looks. A man of "strapping" physique, younger in a general effect than probably he is; immense chest and shoulders, great "meaty" back; constructed like (we picture) those gladiators Borrow lyrically acclaims the "noble bruisers of old England;" complexion (to employ perhaps an excessive stylistic restraint) not pale. A heavy stick. A fondness for stocks. Very becoming. A vitality with an aversion, apparently, to wearing an overcoat in the coldest weather; deeming this probably an appurtenance of the invalid. Funny style of trousers as if made for legs about a foot longer. In the reign of "high waters!"

We had picked up the notion that Mr. Davis was a snobbish person; we found him a very friendly man; gentle, describes it, in manner. Very respectful to clerks: "One of the other gentlemen here ordered another book for me," he mentions. But more. A sort of camaraderie. Says, one day, that he just stepped in to dodge some people he saw coming. Inquires, "Well, what's going on in the book world?" Buys travel books, Africa and such. Buys a quart of ink at a clip. He conveyed to us further, unconsciously, perhaps, a subtle impression that he was, in sympathy, on our side, so to

say; in any difficulty that would be, that might arise, with "the boys," in a manner of speaking. Veteran globe trotter and soldier of fortune on the earth's surface, Mr. Davis suffered a considerable shock to discover in tête-à-tête that we had never been in London. *London?* Such a human vegetable, we saw, was hardly credible.

"Charge," he said, "to James Hunker." He pronounced his name in a very eccentric fashion, the first syllable like that in "hunter." In our commerce with the world we have, with this rather important exception, invariably heard this "u" as in "humid." A substantial figure, very erect in carriage, supporting his portliness with that physical pride of portly men, moving with the dignity of bulk; a physiognomy of Rodinesque modeling. His cane a trim touch to the ensemble. Decidedly affable in manner to us. "Very nice man," comments our hasty note. "One of our young gentlemen here, black eyes, black hair"—describes with surprising memory of exact observation a fellow-serf—"was to get a book for me a couple of months ago." Bought the Muther monograph on Goya. Referred humorously to his new book—one on music. Said, "Many people won't believe that one can be equally good, or perhaps bad, at many things." Spoke of Arnold Bennett; said he was "a hard-working journalist as well as a novel writer." Seemed to possess the greater respect, great esteem, for the character of journalist. We felt a reminiscence of that solid practicality of sentiment of another heavy man. "Nobody but a block-head," said Dr. Johnson, "ever wrote except for money."

Mentioned the novel then just out, "Predestined." "He [the author] is one of our [Sun] men, you know." Fraternal pride and affection in inflection, though he said he did not know Mr. Whitman. "Thank you very much indeed," he said at leaving.

From his carriage, moving slowly in on the arm of a Japanese boy, his servant, came one day John La Farge. Tales of the Far East, profound erudition, skin of sear parchment, Indian philosophies, exotic culture, incalculable age, inscrutable wisdom, intellectual mystery, a dignity deep in its appeal to the imagination—such was the connotation of this presence. (Fine as that portrait by Mr. Cortissoz.) An Oriental scholar, all right, we thought. Mr. La Farge was in search of some abstruse art books. He did not care, he said, what language they were in, except German. He said he hated German. "Well, we have to go to the German for many things, you know," we said. "Yes," said Mr. La Farge, "we have to die, too, but I don't want to any sooner than I can help."

A very light-colored new Norfolk suit, with a high hat; an exceedingly neat black cutaway coat and handsome checked trousers, a decidedly big derby hat (flat on top,) an English walking coat, with plaid trousers to match, the whole about a dozen checks high. This? An inventory of the wardrobe of Dr. Henry van Dyke, as it has been displayed to our appreciation. Has not the handsome wardrobe been a familiar feature in the history of literature? And does anybody like Dr. Goldsmith the less for having loved a lovely coat?

A slight figure, very erect and alert. A dapper, dignified step. Movement

precise. An effect of a good deal of nose glasses. Black, heavy rims. A wide, black tape. Head perpendicular, drawn back against the neck. Grave, scholarly face, chiseled with much refinement of technique; foil to the studious complexion a dark, silken mustache. Holding our thumb-nail sketch up to the light we see it thus.

We regret that our view of this figure so prominent in our literature is perforce so entirely external. But for this Dr. van Dyke has no one to blame but himself, his fastidiousness in clerks. Ignoring, as he passes, our offer of service; at the desk where he seats himself he removes his hat—a large head, we note, for the figure, a good deal of back as well as top head—and, preparing to write, to fill out the order forms himself, fumbles a great deal with his glasses, taking off and putting on again. A friend discovering him here, he springs up and greets him with much vivacity. His orders written out, he delivers them into the hands of the manager of the shop with whom he chats a bit.

Nature imitated art, indeed, when she designed William Gillette, remarkable fleshly incarnation of the literary figment, Sherlock Holmes. In the soul of Mr. Gillette, as on a stage, we witnessed a dramatic moral conflict. Two natures struggled before us within him. Which would prevail? Mr. Gillette was much interested in Rackham books. Bought a great many. In stock at this time was a very elaborate set in several quarto volumes of "Alice in Wonderland," most ornately bound, with Rackham designs inlaid in levant of various colours in the rich purple levant binding. The illustrations with-

in were a unique, collected set of the celebrated drawings made by various hands for this classic. The price, several hundred dollars. Mr. Gillette was torn with temptation here. And yet was it right for him to be so extravagant? Periodically he came in impelled to inquire if the set had yet been sold. If somebody would only buy the set—why, then, of course—it would be all over.

In our contemplation of the literature we have amused ourselves with philosophic reflection. We recalled that old saw of Oscar Wilde's (as George Moore says of something of Wordsworth's) about the artist tending always to reproduce his own type. And we thought what an excellent model to the illustrator of his own "Married Life of the Frederic Carrolls" Jesse Lynch Williams would have been. No name itself, it struck us, would be happier for Mr. Williams than Frederic Carroll—if it were not Jesse Lynch Williams. A "colletch" chap alumnus. A typical, clever, exceedingly likable young American husband, fairly well to do: it is thus we behold him. Slender, in an English walking coat, smiling agreeably. One, we thought, you would think of as a popular figure in a younger "set."

It is irrelevant, certainly, but we must acknowledge our indebtedness to a lady customer, who supposed that the "Married Life of the Frederic Carrolls" was an historic work, dealing with the domestic existence of the author of "Alice."

Thomas Nelson Page, autographing presentation copies of "A Coast of Bohemia," remarks, "This is one of the rewards of poetry." At this task, or, rather, pleasure, Mr. Page spent

a good part of several successive days in the store. A gentleman, with a flavor of "the South" in his speech, very like his well-known pictures; stocky; an effect of not having, in length, much neck. Light, soft suit, or very becoming Prince Albert, and high hat. "He will wear you out," whispers a colleague to us; "he has no idea where any of his friends live. I doubt if he knows where he lives himself." The junior Mr. Weller, we recollect, when an inn "boots" referred to human-kind in terms natural to his calling. "There's a pair of Hessians in thirteen," he said. Viewing Mr. Page with the eye of an attendant, we should remark that he is a Tartar. But a kindly, patient, courteous, Tartar.

City directories, telephone "books" social registers, "Who's Whos," all are necessary to enable him to tell the addresses of his friends. And these are inadequate. He wishes to send, as a token of his regard, a book, affectionately inscribed, to his friend, let us say, J. M. D—, Esq. We learn by the agency of the machinery to which we have recourse that there reside in the City of New York four gentlemen of this identical name: one on Madison Avenue, one on Ninety-first Street, another in Brooklyn, the other somewhere else. Mr. Page is completely bewildered as to which is his friend. "Well, I don't know," he says, "but this man married former Senator So-and-So's daughter." Now, can't we solve that, somehow? Historic Spirit! we cried that day, impracticality of literary men for petty, mundane details, here hast thou still thy habitat, a temple in Mr. Page!

ROBERT C. HOLLIDAY.

(In the "N. Y. Evening Post" and "N. Y. Times")